



United States
Office of Personnel Management

FWS Job Grading Standard for

Gardener

5003

TS-17, 6/71

**Workforce Compensation and Performance Service
Classification Programs Division
June 1998, HRCD-5**

WORK COVERED

This standard covers nonsupervisory work requiring knowledge of gardening procedures and skill in growing and tending lawns, flowers, shrubs, and trees. The work includes preparing soil for plants, seeding, thinning, transplanting, trimming, pruning, fertilizing, aerating, mulching, spraying, and dusting of grass, ground cover, flowers, shrubs, and trees.

WORK NOT COVERED

The following kinds of work are not covered by this standard:

- Operation of powered vehicles such as riding lawn mowers and farm tractors with attachments used to cultivate, seed, harrow, or rake ([5700 Mobile Industrial Equipment Operation Family, e.g., Tractor Operator, 5705](#));
- Laboring work such as loading and unloading supplies and equipment, spading, digging ditches, raking leaves, and shoveling snow ([Laborer, 3502](#));
- Tree work requiring knowledge of ropes, knots, rigging, and hitches and operation of equipment such as gasoline chain saws, motorized winches, and block and tackle, e.g., cutting dead limbs from large trees and removing logs from densely wooded areas ([5000 Agricultural, Forestry, and Kindred Occupations Family](#)); and,
- Data collection in support of scientific, professional, or other studies of soil, plants, or plant insects (Position-Classification Standards).

TITLES

Jobs graded by this standard are to be titled *Gardener*.

GRADE LEVELS

This standard does not describe all possible levels at which jobs may be established. If jobs differ substantially from the skill, knowledge, and other work requirements described in the grade levels of the standard, they may warrant grading either above or below these grades based on application of sound job evaluation principles. The grade levels described in this standard include hazards, physical hardships, and working conditions that are a regular and recurring part of the gardening occupation. This standard does not provide any additional grade credit for exposure to hazards, physical hardships, and working conditions that may be of an "unusual nature" as defined in Appendix J of the Operating Manual for the Federal Wage System.

NOTE TO USERS

Some jobs involve a combination of equipment operation and gardening work. These jobs are graded according to the policy for grading mixed jobs described in [Part I, Explanation of the Job Grading System](#), Grading Trades and Labor Jobs. For jobs graded and titled as Gardener, the parenthetical title of (Tractor Operator) is added when skill in operating tractors is also required to qualify for the gardening job. The parenthetical title of (Motor Vehicle Operator) is added when skill in operating trucks (or trucks and tractors) is required to qualify for the gardening job.

5003-4**Gardener, Grade 4****5003-4**

General: Grade 4 gardeners do seasonal gardening tasks such as fertilizing, preparing seedbeds, transplanting, laying sod, aerating, pruning, trimming, and applying chemicals to plants according to directions.

After the grade 4 gardeners are told which plants to tend and the nature of work to be done, they complete their assignments with little review during its progress. New or unfamiliar procedures are explained. Completed work is checked to see that instructions have been followed.

Skill and Knowledge: Grade 4 gardeners must know how to do seasonal gardening tasks. For example, they know how to apply fertilizer evenly to avoid underfeeding or burning plants. They prepare soil from instructions on the proper mixture of such materials as sand, humus, topsoil, and fertilizer. They place seeds and plants in soil at proper depth, taking care not to damage roots while transplanting. They lay sod, aerate lawns, and prune and trim shrubs and hedges for a neat appearance. They harvest, label, and store seeds and bulbs for later use.

Grade 4 gardeners use a variety of hand- and power-operated garden tools and equipment such as seeders, spreaders, edgers, hedge trimmers, pruning shears, and sprayers. In doing their work, they look for obvious plant diseases (molds, brown spot, rusts, blight, mildew), plant insects (leaf miners, scale, borers, slugs), and unusual or poor plant growth and report these conditions to their supervisor. In some jobs, they measure and mix specified amounts of fungicides, insecticides, and herbicides following instructions on product labels. They may also spray or dust with these chemicals according to instructions.

Responsibility: Grade 4 gardeners are told the specific plants to tend and nature of work to be done. They complete their work with little review during its progress. In measuring and mixing fertilizer or chemical control agents, they follow directions from their supervisor or the manufacturer's label. The supervisor gives advice on new procedures and checks the work to see that instructions have been followed.

In transplanting, the gardener carefully handles roots of plants to insure continued growth in the new location. In applying fertilizer or chemicals, they are careful to avoid damaging plants and to avoid spraying people and animals in the area with toxic materials.

Physical Effort: The work requires frequent walking, standing, pushing of carts and wheelbarrows, bending, and stooping. The gardener occasionally climbs ladders to prune or trim vegetation and frequently lifts heavy objects such as bags of fertilizer, grass seed, etc.

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Working Conditions: Work is done outside or in a greenhouse. In working outside, the gardener is subject to discomfort from long periods in the hot sun, and sometimes to chilly or rainy weather. Being exposed to dirt, dust, mud, and sometimes to chemical sprays and dusts, they may wear protective clothing such as gloves, safety shoes, and boots. There is chance of minor injuries such as bruises, cuts, and scrapes and occasional possibility of broken bones from falls.

5003-6**Gardener, Grade 6****5003-6**

General: In comparison with grade gardeners who are told which gardening tasks to do, grade 6 gardeners consider the seasonal schedules or project plans for their area, suitability of the weather, degree of moisture in the soil, and stage of plant growth in deciding when and how they will do their work.

In addition to work described at grade 4, grade 6 gardeners figure quantities of plants, seeds, fertilizer, and other materials needed for specific areas. They also start nursery and coldframe beds on their own and select the proper fungicides, insecticides, and herbicides for the control of common plant diseases, plant insects, and weeds.

The supervisor checks to see that the work has been done and that it meets standard gardening practices.

Skill and Knowledge: Grade 6 gardeners must have more knowledge of plants and gardening procedures than grade 4 gardeners to decide when and which standard method they will use. For example, they know and apply the kinds and amounts of fertilizer that are routinely used for grass, flowers, shrubs, and trees, seeing that ground and plant conditions are proper before the application. They decide when plants need additional watering and how long they should be watered. They observe plants and thins or transplants when they have grown too close together or too large for their location. They decide when shrubs have reached the proper stage of growth for trimming and when trees need pruning to remove obviously diseased limbs or excess branches. They seal tree wounds with coating mixtures. They know when and how seeds should be harvested and bulbs removed from the ground for storage. Grade 6 gardeners compute quantities of plants, seeds, and other materials needed for specific areas. In starting new plants in seedbeds or coldframes, they know how to build a good soil base, how to place seeds at proper depth, and the moisture, temperature, humidity, and ventilation requirements needed to encourage germination and growth. They may also reproduce plants through cuttings, rootings, grafting, and layering processes, and record the number and kind of plants started, kind of fertilizer used, etc.

While grade 4 gardeners notify their supervisor of the presence of plant insects and disease, grade 6 gardeners select and use fungicides, insecticides, and herbicides for the control of common plant diseases, plant insects, and weeds.

Responsibility: Grade 6 gardeners are told what project needs to be accomplished, what area they are assigned to, and the regular and recurring seasonal planting and maintenance schedule which has been planned for his area. In comparison with grade 4 gardeners who follow instructions on the specific work to be done, grade 6 gardeners plan and carry out their work according to the schedule or project assignment, keeping within the framework of established gardening practices.

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In doing this work, they follow manufacturer's instructions on product labels regarding the depth and spacing of seeds, application of chemicals and fertilizers, etc., and use gardening procedures which are routinely performed in the local area. Their supervisor is available to give advice on new or unfamiliar gardening methods or problems that arise and checks to see that the completed work meets acceptable standards.

Physical Effort: Physical effort at this grade is the same as that described at the [grade 4 level](#).

Working Conditions: Working conditions at this grade are the same as those described at the [grade 4 level](#), except that grade 6 gardeners are usually exposed to chemical sprays and dusts more frequently than at the lower grade levels.

5003-8**Gardener, Grade 8****5003-8**

General: In contrast to grade 6 gardeners who follow seasonal schedules or plans for their area, grade 8 gardeners consider the individual needs or characteristics of plants in work such as adjusting mineral content of soil; sloping and planting of terraces; transplanting a wide variety of grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees; and pruning trees to obtain a proper balance between roots and top growth.

They work from project plans, master landscape, and long-range plans, making independent judgments within the framework of good gardening practices. Their work is evaluated by the results achieved.

Skill and Knowledge: Grade 8 gardeners must know how to propagate and cultivate a wide variety of plants and perform a wide range of gardening work. For example, in addition to knowing the standard fertilizing practices followed by grade 6 gardeners, grade 8 gardeners know how to increase or decrease the lime, calcium salt, or sulphur content so that acid or alkaline conditions are neutralized in line with plant requirements. They use various foliage feeding, root feeding, and soil additive techniques in fertilizing different varieties of plants.

They slope and plant terraces and sod steep banks or heavy traffic patterns that involve difficult holding and growth problems. They also recommend plants for particular purposes, e.g., shade, boundary lines, ground cover, erosion control, or pleasing appearance. In transplanting, they select the location for best plant growth and development considering soil conditions, hardiness of plants, foliage at various stages of growth, flowering periods, and the overall landscape plan. They know which plants are moved when they are dormant and consider the angle of slope, the possibility of soil erosion, and the makeup of surface crust. When setting out trees, they shape and slope pits to provide proper drainage and sufficient air for the roots.

In comparison with the grade 6 level which involves pruning and trimming shrubs, trees, and other plants to remove obvious defects and excess branches, grade 8 gardeners prune to obtain a proper balance between roots and top growth; to modify or retain the natural form; and to increase fruit and flower production. They reshape tree wounds by bark tracing to stimulate the flow of healing sap and growth of tissue over the wound; when large areas of a tree are diseased or injured, they hollow the area so that it will drain properly. Based on the type of pest or tree disease and age of the tree, they recommend or apply proper chemical compounds for the specific condition.

In addition to control measures for common plant diseases and plant insects typical of the grade 6 level, grade 8 gardeners recognize and control infrequent plant diseases, cold damage, and mineral deficiencies. They record corrective procedures used, including any new processes applied and the results achieved.

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Responsibility: In comparison with the grade 6 level at which gardeners are told the seasonal work which needs to be done for his area, grade 8 gardeners perform a wide range of gardening work on their own. They consult gardening books or catalogues regarding physical characteristics of plants and individual plant requirements for sun, water, minerals, and soil mixture. Within the framework of good gardening practices and project or master landscape plans, they make independent judgments, e.g., in treating soil and in deciding which plants will be moved, where they will be transplanted, and how problem conditions will be treated. They recommend changes for improvement in the overall landscape plan and obtain approval on projects which require unplanned expense or significant periods of time.

Physical Effort: Physical effort at this grade is the same as that described at the [grade 4 level](#), except that grade 8 gardeners usually do more work involving climbing ladders and stretching to reach tree limbs.

Working Conditions: Working conditions at this grade are the same as those described at the [grade 6 level](#).